



# National Vital Statistics System

## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

Policymakers and program managers need information from vital records such as birth and death statistics to develop policy and direct public health programs. The National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) is the primary source of this information, producing the nation's official vital statistics. The collection and registration of vital events are governed by the laws of 57 states and registration areas. Vital records and reports originate with hospitals, physicians, and funeral directors. Records are then compiled by the states and forwarded to CDC, which works with the states to ensure consistency in certificate content, data quality, and timeliness of reporting.

## WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

NVSS compiles data on issues of public health concern, such as the number of teen births, prenatal care and birth weight, risk factors for adverse pregnancy outcomes, infant mortality rates, leading causes of death, life expectancy, and firearm-related mortality. This information is then provided in a timely manner to public health officials at the national, state, and local levels, as well as to interested private sector groups.

### *Examples of Program in Action:*

NVSS has compiled the following data from national vital statistics:

- Data for 2003 show the teen birth rate has dropped 33 percent since 1991. Between 2002 and 2003 the teen birth rate dropped 3 percent, from 43.0 to 41.7 per 1,000 females 15-19 years of age.
- Data for 2003 show life expectancy in the U.S. at birth was 77.6 years for all races, 78.0 years for whites, and 72.8 years for blacks.
- The infant mortality rate increased from 6.8 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 6.9 in 2003. A rise in neonatal infant deaths (infants less than 28 days old) prompted the overall rate to increase in 2003.

## WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

To address 21<sup>st</sup> century data-needs with 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, CDC plans to invest in fundamental improvements in the nation's vital statistics system. The improvement will include:

- Implementing new national model certificates of birth, death, and fetal death events to improve data quality and update the content of these data sources to reflect new needs such as changing classification of race/ethnicity, and new and emerging concerns in maternal and infant health and public health.

NCHS will work with states and the National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems to jointly develop a national prototype system that states may use to operate some or all aspects of their vital statistics system. This system will be an off-the-shelf product that would be based on the national consensus requirements, the specifications, and the new U.S. Standard certificates. It would meet 90 percent of any state's needs, but would be easily customizable for those states desiring additional functionality.